

PETER WILLIAMS

If our short excursions into these forgotten regions of American history have served no other end or aim surely they will serve at least to prove the oneness of human nature among the children of men. They show that amid like circumstances the emotions and passions of humanity are moved and moulded by the same impulses and forces. "All our rights," says the philosophic Burke somewhat narrowly, "date back to one universal law by which we are held and bound and from which we can never swerve." Or as a noted poet of the same race has perhaps with greater felicity sung;

"Mankind is one in its rights and wrongs

One hope, one faith, one guard."

Though old in theory and well-known to the arena of ethnic discussion, this doctrine has had a hard struggle to win a general acceptance in the daily comity of mankind, and it is pleasant to know that the colored race has had some little share in bringing forward this era of better feeling. Of the careers herein recorded which have done most to prove that universality of human nature - the susceptibility of man everywhere to like influences when similarly placed, none have borne better testimony than the New York Williams, both father and son, of long ago. Fate has dealt all too miserly with the memory of the older Williams, having left us only two or three incidents in a life often filled with romance and heroic endeavor, and of the little known it is probably as timely to speak here as anywhere else and this narrative. From the son's own words we gather that Peter Williams the father was born a slave in New York in the early years of the 18th century but purchased his freedom through the aid and intercession of some Methodist friends some time prior to the revolution. The purchase probably took place in the early '60's of the 18th century as a great Methodist wave following the coming of Embury and Asbury began to sweep the country at that time. After his freedom the older Williams resided for a long while at New Brunswick, N. J.

now the well-known manufacturing city some 30 miles Southwest of New York. It was in fact while the family was still living in this New Jersey town that the son Peter himself was born there in 1786 immediately after the stormy days of the Revolution. Indeed the father had borne some little part in connection with the war for Independence and several anecdotes are preserved to us of his achievements and exploits which go to show how much more exalted in character was our subject with his thousand causes for treachery than were the Arnolds and Andres about the same time and place.

The Williamses were back in New York City soon after the revolution where the ardent Methodism which had won the father his freedom now not only won him a high standing in the membership of that denomination but made him janitor of the John St. Methodist church the first place of worship that the Methodist people erected in that city. In this capacity the elder Williams served for many years, remaining in fact long after the colored

members had separated from the white Methodists and established in 1798 what became known as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, - the mother of the great denomination by that name of today. Mr. Williams was one of that number who obtained permission from Bishop Francis Asbury first to hold meetings apart from the whites during the intervals between regular services, was one of the committee appointed 1799 to provide ways and means to build the first regular colored place of worship at Church and Leonard Sts. Of this church our subject was also one of the first trustees as well as one of the committee who obtained the charter for its separate organization from the state of New York in 1801. Most of the committee meetings for this purchase were at the same time held at the Williams homestead 53 Liberty St. over the Williams tobacco factory where in addition to the above the ex-slave was conducting a prosperous business in the manufacturing tobacco. This last in fact was the real business of the elder Williams' life; for it was as a tobaccoist that the old man became famous in and around New York, winning both wealth and prominence in his day. His name became a guarantee for a high grade of that commodity, having been the first to make use of steam in producing it, and in the language of Francis, the historian of old New York, he "was then striving to sustain a rival opposition in the tobacco line with the famous house of the Lorrillards." (Francis Old New York page 150) It may be that the wholesome respect which this friendly rivalry in business taught the great tobaccoist for the memory of his old time rival is the explanation for Mr. Lorrillard's generous benefaction in connection with the building of St. Phillips Church in later years.

But it is the pen and voice achievements of the son, the Rev. Peter Williams, Jr. that have called forth this sketch and historical retrospect, for it is his literary remains after all which have won the family a place in this work.

REV. PETER WILLIAMS, Jr.

Peter Williams the younger was born in December 1786 (he himself says) in New York city; others give the place as Brunswick, New Jersey. He was the son of Peter and Nancy Williams both of whom were from the first devout members of the John St. Methodist Church. Like them young Williams also came first under the influence of Wesleyanism whence he seems to have gotten most of his early religious impressions. His mind was early turned however, to the tenets of Episcopalianism through Rev. Thomas Lyell of whose charge, in Christ Church in New York City he became a devout member. This according to Rev. Douglass (page 244) took place about his 17th or 18th year some time probably after 1804 as Rev. Lyell himself did not begin his pastorate in New York till towards the end of that year. Rev. Lyell had also been caught up in the wave of Methodism on its first coming and acquired that peculiar earnestness of its preachers which he carried with him into the Episcopal church. He was therefore all the better conditioned to influence young Williams' mind; and what was still more effective that Reverend gentleman as was the case with so many of the active friends of the Negro of that day was a Southerner both by birth and education and showed that fearlessness of consequences characteristic of Southerners whenever and wherever they have chosen to cut loose from the prejudice of their section and take the colored man's side for fair-play. Rev. Lyell's course throughout his connection with Peter Williams was, as we shall see of the most unswerving Christian nature. But Peter Williams found about this time another friend in Right Reverend Benjamin Moore Bishop of the New York Diocese who was even better situated both by reason of wealth and position to render him lasting service. And this Bishop did; for it was largely through his powerful influence in aiding Williams as well as endorsing Rev. Lyell's attitude that the young colored man became in after years an Episcopal priest. Both of those old distinguished divines encouraged him with the aid of books and doctrinal instruction. Bishop Moore himself directing Mr. Williams' studies, or through his influence as President of Columbia College assigning others to do it. But just a word about the attitude of the New York diocese towards the blacks before proceeding further with this particular case.

It had been the custom of Trinity Church throughout its history from 1697 when it was organized to care for the spiritual welfare of the colored people in some form. This was at first done by volunteers among the regular members who went out as teachers on Sundays among the "Africans". But in 1702 when the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was organized special provision was made for instructing the colored communicants and catechists were employed to attend to their spiritual needs. The catechist was usually assistant minister of Trinity at first but the work gradually passed into other hands until it came at length to Elias Neau immortal in the annals of education as the first regular teacher of black children in New York. Neau



often convened the people of his charge at his own house where he instructed them as men and brethren in the principles of virtue and religion. He himself was a scholar of great erudition and *zeal, and* through his connection with Trinity Church the people under his tutelage were generally shielded in the numerous persecutions of the blacks in colonial days. (McCoy St. Phillips page 13) These colored Episcopalians continued to take advantage of the assistance of Trinity in an ever increasing number until after the Revolution - until in fact the number had become so large as to make necessary a separate place of worship. For this they were at first accommodated at Trinity after the regular services, but secured a place of their own about 1812 over the William St. colored school No. 1

Now it was while this congregation was worshipping here under the ministrations of a Mr. John McCombs that Rev. Peter Williams appears on the scene as a lay-reader and an assistant to him. Mr. Williams made it a practice to meet the children of this parish about an hour before public services and instruct them in the catechism. Though not yet a minister all of his work was directed towards that end. He was continued through ballot as lay-reader in the little St. Phillips congregation wherever it found a place of worship, and had no doubt been selected by his two powerful friends with an eye single to that purpose. Colored churches were rapidly springing in New York at this time; the Methodists had built three churches there between 1800 and 1809; the Baptist one in 1805, and the Presbyterians themselves though always conservative, were already getting together a congregation which launched its own church under Samuel E. Cornish in 1820. As to the exact time when our subject became the protégé of these two divines there is not now any means of knowing, as the incident is not mentioned in the short accounts of any of the interested parties which have come down to us. It is in all probability antedates the year 1808 however as we find Bishop Moore endorsing the genuineness of an oration by Peter Williams, Jr. on the cessation of the slave trade which the young orator delivered in January of that year. But at whatever time this friendship of the great Bishop for the young man began, it seems to have been genuinely warm and continued so till the death of Dr. Moore in 1816. And even then the attitude of the New York diocese towards him cannot be said to have undergone any change, for Bishop Hobart who now succeeded to the bishopric was apparently as friendly to the lay reader as was his predecessor. In fact he would seem to have been even more so. For in 1818 the St. Phillips Church was organized out of the congregation to which Mr. Williams had so long been lay-reader, and a new church edifice at the cost of \$8000. was erected by them - all of which was greatly encouraged by the Bishop. Of the building and dedication of this Collect St. edifice Bishop Hobarts said in his annual report on the 6th of July 1820: "on the 3rd of July last I consecrated the new church



of St. Phillips. x x x To its erection they contributed largely in proportion to their means and the trustees were unwearied in their exertions to obtain the contributions of others, and in their attentions to the building while it was erecting, in which their own mechanics principally were employed, and which they have finished with judgment and taste."

This first church was a small wooden structure some 60 by 50 feet in size and of but a single story in height, standing the short time of its existence in Collect St. between Anthony and Leonard Sts., and was consecrated and thrown open for public worship on Sunday the 3rd of July 1819 with a sermon by Bishop Hobart. But by all odds the most important event in the life of our subject as yet was his ordination to the deaconate which took place in this new St. Phillips Church, Oct. 20th, 1820. The candidate was attended on this occasion by his most faithful and constant friend and teacher Rev. Thomas Lyell as sponsor, while Bishop Hobart himself who had also become one of Mr. Williams' teachers was consecrator. Rev. Lyell delivered also the ordination discourse, laying much stress upon the duty of the pastor to his members, and of his congregation towards the pastor, and above all the necessity of brotherly love and harmony among the membership at large. Nor could a matter of such importance even in that day of general contempt for the colored people pass off without public notice. The Commercial Advertiser on the following day (Oct. 21, 1820) announced: "Yesterday morning Mr. Peter Williams, Junior, was admitted to the holy Order of Deacons in St. Phillips's Church by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Hobart. The new deacon is a person of color who being possessed of good natured parts, has much improved his intellectual faculties by intense study and application, and has written several little tracts which abundantly show that 'with God there is no respect of persons.' Mr. Williams is of unexceptionable morals and his zeal in the cause of our blessed Redeemer is well known, it is devoutly to be hoped that he be a useful minister in the Christian church, and of great service in propagating the gospel among his African brethren."

<sup>truth</sup> In this event caused a far livelier satisfaction in the community than even this friendly account conveys; the whole diocese was elated over the event, with Bishop Hobart himself heartily indorsing it. The Bishop had previously held a pastoral charge in Philadelphia where the success of St. Thomas colored Episcopal church with its colored priest Reb. Jones had come under his notice. Bishop William White of the Philadelphia diocese who had consecrated both the St. Thomas Church and pastor was especially friendly to the colored race. He was himself the first American bishop created after the revolution and consecrated for the bishopric all the other bishops of the country during the first quarter of the 19th century. His attitude towards the colored people, therefore had great influence with his denomination and as there was already a sharp rivalry between New York and

Philadelphia for leadership in population and commercial supremacy the opportunity to equal or surpass the latter city in anything was gladly welcomed not only as further evidence of the rising superiority of the rapidly growing New York, but as a good opportunity for this New York diocese to catch the lock-step in that liberality which we have seen had been manifesting itself towards the colored people for the past three decades

The new deacon now set about bringing together a large membership for his church and with that gentleness and urbanity for which he was noted throughout life was beginning to show unwonted success in the task when a disastrous fire utterly destroyed the whole church. This calamity occurred on the ~~21st~~ 21 of December, 1821 while the enthusiastic parishioners were busy making ready for Christmas and like most cold weather fires was the result of defective chimney flues. Such a sad experience on the very threshold of his ministry would have been regarded as irretrievable by any otherman than Peter Williams, but Williams had not studied and waited long years for admission to the ministry to no purpose. With that assiduity and perseverance which proved to be among his chief attributes in after years he threw himself into the work of rebuilding his church, and by means of the insurance money which his prudent foresight had made possible out of the destruction of the old a new edifice of brick some 70 by 40 ft. rose phoenix-like from the ashes of its former self. The new building was completed and consecrated in December (21) 1822, at the cost of \$2000 in addition to the \$8000, recieved from insurance and that sum, large for that day and cause, was raised mainly by the exertions of Mr. Williams. Our subject now redoubled his labors in trying to increase his membership and in the language of Bishop Hobart "under the judicious, zealous and "prudent ministrations of their pastor," 115 persons were presented to the bishop for confirmation in 1826 alone.\*

The success of Mr. Williams as prudent and judiciously active minister had by this time became so thoroughly evident, and satisfactory to his diocese that nothing could now be done in the way of a reward but raise him to the rank of an Episcopal minister and this Bishop Hobart hastened to do on the 10th of July, 1826. Accordingly Mr. Williams accompanied by his devoted friend Rev. Thomas Lyell repaired to his new church on the above date and there before a large congregation made up of leading friends and members of other colored churches as well as of his own flock was ordained minister of St. Phillips colored Episcopal Church by

---

\*\*\* (St. Phillips church has been forced twice to seek new quarters on account of the shift of population and the residential districts of New York since Rev. Williams' day. The first change was from Center to Mulberry St in 1859 during the rectorship of Rev. Dr. Morris; and the second was from Mulberry to 25th St. during the rectorship of Rev. Hutchins Bishop in 1886)

Rt. Rev. John Henry Hobart assisted by the reverend Lyall and Duffie. Rev. Benjamin Onderdonk himself later on bishop and noted for the eloquent sermon at the decease of our subject preached the sermon of ordination. Thus by patient study and industry had this son of a slave risen from low estate to be minister in the most conservative denomination of the ~~protest~~ protestant faith. Surely it was indeed the proudest day in the life of Peter Williams, Jr.; for now he was in name as well as indeed the Rev. Mr. Williams and henceforth he threw himself heart and soul not only into the ministrations of his parish but with equal through noiseless force into the other movements for the uplift of his race at all times dear to his heart some of which we shall now recall a little more at length.

In speaking of Rev. Williams' preparation for his life-work as a preacher mention has been made of some "tracts" by him published at a time antedating his entrance into the ministry. Two of these have survived the wreck of time, and bear witness to the thorough work done in preliminary stages of his ministered studies. But of these productions - there are but two of them - ~~contribute~~ contribute very important documents in the history of the colored race, forming in truth distinct landmarks on the high way of their progress no less in the sociological than in the literary field. These compositions have reached us in the form of orations the first of which was delivered on the 1st of January 1808 in commemoration of the end of the African Slave trade which expired by constitutional limitation on that date. Only a very faint idea can now be formed by the degradation and dehumanizing effect that the presence of that accursed institution inflicted upon the intelligent colored people of that day. They could scarcely reach an elevated thought of themselves as human before some slave-ship from over the remorseless deep would dampen the distended wing of their fancy. Scarcely a day passed that did not remind them the blacks were just a little less than human. When therefore the starless horizon of that long night of sorrow was first streaked with the phosphoric through cheering rays of this day of new hope the intelligent blacks, fancying the dawn of false morning the real beginning of their day of salvation hastened like the mistaken Israelites to prostrate themselves before this Baal of liberty. But while the God himself proved false the adoration was no less heartfelt and genuine. On the 1st day of January 1808, therefore, the largest gathering of free intelligent blacks New York had hitherto seen assembled, filled the A. M. E. Zion Church throughout the day in honor of the passing of the nefarious habit of trading in fellow-creatures. Mr. William Hamilton, grandfather of the highly respectable family that name still represented in New York and Boston had arranged a superb musical programme for the occasion. Thomas Simkins, another leader of that day, stated the object and cause of the meeting in a few well chosen remarks, and other memorable names appear in the scene as



actors, but the chief place of honor on the programme was reserved for Peter Williams, Jr. who as orator of the day poured forth upon the astonished town such a flood of eloquence that it took the certificates or depositions of four or five leading citizens to convince the incredulous public that the oration could possibly be the production of the colored orator! The oration with attestations, published within a week or so after its delivery was finally accepted as the original work of the orator, though probably not as an extemporaneous effort as was generally claimed for it by some admirers. In fact one of those who bore witness to the genuineness of authorship thought that "though in the revisal of it he received some small aid." The second of these orations was delivered before the New York African Institution in the A. M. E. Zion Church, again, of that city on the 21st of Oct. 1813, and had for its theme the life and achievements of Capt. Paul Cuffee, the noted black sea-faring philanthropist who died at New Bedford, Mass on the 7th of the preceding month.

For the benefit of those who may not readily recall it, it may be added in brief here that Paul Cuffee was a colored citizen born in 1759, of mixed African and Indian parentage on one of the Elizabeth Isles in Vineyard Sound now well known as Nashan, the summer home of the rich, and with a small intervening sheet of water constitutes part of Dukes County, Massachusetts. Cuffee as has always been the case with the people of his section took early to a sea-faring life, passing successfully through the grades of Cabin boy, sailor, and captain and finally became owner of a vessel which he manned with a colored crew and with which he amassed a fortune in the carrying trade. He was a devout Quaker and a lover of his race, and in his latter days became so interested in African colonization that he carried a cargo of emigrants out to Sierra Leone at his own expense stocking them at the same time with sufficient supplies to last them until crops could be grown. Cuffee carried on a correspondence with the British people about colonization and was on the point of going out with the second load when overtaken by death on the 7th of Sept. 1813. Colonization was not then held in the same light as it came to be regarded in latter years when it was used simply as a means to drain off the more intelligent free blacks lest their presence excite the hope of freedom in the breast of the slave. At that day all philanthropists regarded repatriation as a possibility and a laudable undertaking and the more thoughtful of the race looked upon it as the only door to manhood and equality of rights. Hence the glory of Cuffee and his gigantic scheme became the burden of the colored man's song and story of that day, especially there in New York where we have already seen evidence of distinct understanding of the trend of events. Mr. Williams' oration is without a doubt the best expression of this hope and understanding, and the fact that it was delivered before numerous colored organizations gathered in the old mother Zion Church for that purpose showed that the race was already aroused to the consciousness of their own needs. Thus did they honor the name of that great black

who single-handed and with his own means strove to redeem both a race and continent! Viewed in this light the oration has a distinct historical value apart from its literary merit. Yet who can gainsay the latter when the time, place and circumstances are considered? Ten years have elapsed since the delivery of the former speech - years during which our author aided and encouraged as already indicated under the Rev. Henry Channing Moore, who had himself through misfortune been forced to prepare for the ministry by his own ~~exertions~~ exertions. And notwithstanding this early handicap he yet arose to be Bishop of Virginia! Therefore -

"As taught by time his heart had learned to glow  
For others Good or meet at others' woe-

Rev. Moore was glad to put his time and experience at the disposal of the despised black, and Peter Williams, eager to avail himself of them, had become by 1818 one of the best informed colored men in the country. All of this the oration on Capt. Paul Cuffee clearly shows. Here the style is more reserved and the sequence both in thought and language of steadier development. We get it this oration better even than in his famous letter of after years the author's felicity in diction and concise expression, while a faint suspicion that apart from that letter being written to soften the acerbity of proslavery towards the Episcopal denomination in the days of antislavery riots, Bishop Onderdonk further modified it both in language and by the suppressing of whole paragraphs, no ~~such~~ such influence was brought to bear in the case of the speech. Dr. James McCune Smith who from the time of his graduation at the University of Edinburgh 1838, till his death in 1865 came to be looked upon as the legitimate biographer for all distinguished blacks has left us a pregnant statement of Rev. Mr. Williams' scholarship and literary gift with both pen and voice, and as our author was already nearing his 40th year on the day of the Paul Cuffee celebration, it may be assumed that his style underwent little change after that date. Said he of our orator: "He had mastered logic and algebra, and read Latin with some facility and was extravagantly fond of metaphysics, he enjoyed, he had formed a style in composition as clear, concise and elegant that few men of twice his years and with every advantage have excelled him." (See Nells' Colored Patriots of the Revolution 321)

page 324

Of the famous letter of resignation from the Executive Committee of the American antislavery Society it ought further to be added that it brought down upon its author's head much sharp criticism from antislavery workers at the time, Garrison himself speaking of it as "culpably submissive." But the circumstances amid which it was written should not be lost sight of in considering Mr. Williams' actions. This letter was written and given to the press on the 14th of July 1844 in response to another from Bishop Onderdonk advising him to withdraw from all abolitionist connection, and as far as official connection was concerned Rev.

Williams complied with the request. This attitude on his part was obligatory from his position as an Episcopalian minister, the ministry of that connection being bound by oath to obey the bishop's commands, and Rev. Williams knew this as his critics did not and could not know. Of course he could have left that denomination for another but he doubtless concluded and rightly that with the aegis of that powerful and influential church over him he could be of more service to his race than without it. And looked at from our day when all the circumstances connected with it have become "old unhappy, far-off things," we can hardly do otherwise than agree with him. At the time of the publication of that letter, just after Garrison's immortal attack on African Colonization and the formation of the American Antislavery Society during the previous fall and winter (1833) the whole country with New York as the centre was the scene of antislavery riots and disorder such as had not before been seen. Colored people were mobbed wherever found in a gathering and their places of meeting burned. Rev. Williams' church itself had been closed for a time in 1834, and in fact was thus closed when the letter was written. There was hardly another course left to him but to do as he did, and time would seem to have justified his action. But even William Lloyd Garrison in spite of his fling at the "letter" always had the highest regard for the able preacher. Mr. Williams had been among the earliest of colored men to come to the great philanthropist's side with money and encouragement. He had made himself responsible for \$100 of the expense of Garrison's first trip to England in 1833 and was a constant subscriber to the Liberator till the end of his days. Indeed there could have been no Liberator had it not been for the aid of colored people in supporting that Journal at the start. All colored Boston, New York and Philadelphia became subscribers almost from the beginning. It was mainly through leading wealthy men like Joseph Cassey, James Forten and Purvis that the Liberator was kept afloat as Garrison himself well says (Vol 1 page 312). Indeed he was aided by more than the money of the colored people; and this he frankly admits in a letter to a friend in 1832.

After a visit to the home of Robert Purvis in attendance on a colored convention there he wrote: "I wish you had been with me in Philadelphia to see what I saw, to hear what I heard, and to experience what I felt, in associating with many colored families. There are colored men and women, young men and young ladies, in that city, who have few superiors in refinement, in morals worth and in all that makes the human character worthy of admiration and praise." (Vol 1 page 284)

No one recognized more quickly this service than did Garrison and his kind words for the memory of Rev. Williams, the week following the latter's death, shows how genuine were his regards for the living worth of the dead prelate. But long arduous labor in his parish and in the antislavery and sociological fields had for some time been undermining our author's health and by 1836 had so far



impaired it as to render an ocean trip necessary indeed indispensable, and friends who had become anxious about him urged him to go abroad at the earliest opportunity. Arrangements for a short absence from his church having been perfected, Rev. Williams received his passport to travel abroad from secretary of State Forseith on the 17th of March, 1836.. The real task to get abroad however proved to be neither a lack of money or want of passport, but to find a ship willing to accept Rev. Williams as a passenger. He applied successively to three different lines of packets and by each was met with a curt refusal, and was forced at last to take passage in an English vessel! He succeeded in getting away finally, and spent most of the summer and early autumn of 1836 in Great Britain where his regular connection with the established Church won him social consideration at every turn. He preached in many of the leading pulpits in all parts of the kingdom, winning many favorable compliments by his pious eloquence as well as by his dignified bearing and reserve. His young friend and protegee, James McCune Smith was at that time at college in Scotland where he had gone mainly through the efforts of Rev. Williams, and it was a part of the great preacher's mission abroad to carry him aid and encouragement such as could not be otherwise sent. He remained abroad visiting the different churches, denominations and people and

" Their manners noted and their states surveyed," until the 25th of October when he took passage for home, reaching about the 1st of January 1837. But on account of the poor pilot service for entering the harbor, his ship was driven by storm to Nassau where he remained till nearly the last of March 1837 before reaching New York (Colored American April 22 1837)

The refusal of passage to Mr. Williams by the several American captains did not go without rebuke even at that day. The venerable Noah Webster of dictionary fame, who had himself spent much time abroad, learning of the incident sent a sharp letter to the Boston Register and Observer reprobating the act. He pointed with shame to the difference between the action of the American and British captains in the affair and called on professed christians here to examine themselves in the regards to this matter. He boldly declared: " Were I about to take passage for Europe I should prefer the company of Mr. Williams to that of any man who would decline going with him on account of his color."

On reaching home the pastor of St. Phillips church again threw himself heart and soul into his parish duties and into other works such as literary organizations and church improvement efforts. The phoenix Literary Society with some of the brightest young minds of the race as its leaders engaged much of his time. This influential organization was established in 1833 with Rev. Christopher Rush as President. Arthur Tappan the great antislavery worker was one of its founders, and out of his munificence, bore much of the expense in maintaining its library and rooms. Rooms for the or-

ganization were opened at the corner of Canal and Mercer Sts. where they were favored with courses of lectures by many of the leading clergymen on moral, scientific and historical subjects. The society next moved with what became Phoenix Hall on West Broadway. With them the antislavery lecturing agents also made their headquarters when not on the road. But the greatest work of the Society were the evening school for adult colored people, taught by both colored and white and the High School for colored youth maintained for several years. It was the original purpose of the Phoenix Society to carry on this work in some form in every ward of the city under its board of directors consisting of both colored and white men, (Tappan's Life pp159-62) but he soon learned (what has always been the case with the colored race the country over) that it was not so much the ignorance and backwardness of the blacks themselves they had to contend with as it was the prejudice and race-hatred on the parts of the whites which frowned at every effort and turn to elevate the colored man. This Phoenix Society was an especial favorite with Rev. Williams. Here he was always to be found in an earnest endeavor, trying to shape and improve the condition of his following. Its school features especially, interested him, and he deserves the grateful remembrance for his efforts along this line for the benefit of the aspiring members of the race. There were no places in New York other than the colored public schools Nos. 1 and 2 to which colored youth could find entrance in face scarcely any in the country. Our author knowing this all too well from his own experience and that of others, called to his aid such men as Rev. Theodore S. Wright, Dr. John Brown and other public spirited men of that day and organized this High School and they kept it going in the rooms of the Phoenix Society and other places. When at length church connection would no longer permit Mr. Williams to be active with the antislavery people, he continued his efforts for the High School under his own vine and fig-tree. Says a contemporary paper: "MR. Williams had been engaged since his return from England in efforts to effect permanently the establishment of a high school in connection with his church, but which should be accessible to the children of other denominations who might wish to avail themselves of its benefits. It was not until very recently that he saw his efforts for this object brought to so successful an issue as to warrant him to expect that when the monetary affairs of the country should improve, his object would be accomplished. A William Turpin, Esq., himself a member of the Phoenix Society had left at his death in 1837 some \$7000 in stocks and bonds with the understanding that it should go to the Phoenix Society for the maintaining of its High School. This money intrusted to Messrs. Arthur Tappan and Israel Course got tied up at first by reason of the stringy in the money market at the time, and which continued through the year 1839. It may have been the prospective maturity of this sum that gave Rev. Williams his hopes of assured success for his school. (Colored American July 1st, 1839)

But as we have already seen Rev. Williams was no longer in vigorous health as of yore. Hard struggles to get first himself and then his race over obstacles constantly besetting them had left its injurious effects upon, and as the year 1840 drew near this began to be apparent to his intimate friends by his hectic cough and his asthmatic breathing, but he was still about as usual till, the early hours of that October morning when, after having been aroused by the alarm and watched the progress of a neighboring fire for some time from his window he started to return to bed, but fell, and expired before help could reach him! Thus died Rev. Peter Williams on the 17th of October 1840, and lacking but three days of being the 20th year of his pastorate over St. Phillips' church;- in fact the day of his funeral was on the exact anniversary of his two decades of ministry there. But the funeral service itself deserved to be mentioned at some length; for Rev. Williams was buried amid a solemn pomp and splendor usually shown to the highest officers alone of the Episcopal hierarchy. It is probably that New York City never witnessed since or before such imposing tribute to the worth of a colored man. Nearly every well-known church of the leading protestant denominations was represented by a delegate in the line of funeral march. Bishop Onderdonk himself preached the funeral sermon while the pastors of the chief parishes of the city performed the solemn parts of the service. We are told: "special invitations were sent out to 42 Episcopal clergymen of this city, Bloomingdale and Harlem; to eight of the city of Brooklyn, and one of Jersey city, and to about 20 clergymen of other denominations, colored and white. And about 40 of the former and 16 of the latter attended. The procession left his late residence No. 68 Crosby St. in the following order to wit: All the clergymen preceded the corpse, immediately in front of the corpse (which was borne upon the shoulders of four men, and covered with a pall) were the three officiating clergymen, viz: the Rt. Rev. Benj. T. Onderdonk, D. D. Diocesan. The Rev. Dr. Berran Rector of Trinity church and the Rev. Dr. Lyell of Christ Church. The pall was held by the Rev. Dr. Nulmor, Rector of St. George's Chapel, Rev. Dr. Wainwright, assistant minister of Trinity Church, Rev. Dr. Turner of the Theological Seminary Rev. Dr. McVickar of Columbia College; Rev. Dr. Wilson of the Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr. Barry, Rector St. Matthew Church Jersey City; Rev. Mr. Verren Rector of Dien St. Esprit and Rev. Mr. Johnson Rector St. John's Church Brooklyn. Behind the corpse the male relatives, the vestry of St. Phillips, next the students of the Theological Seminary, next the Phoenix-unions and other literary societies and then the public and closed by the scholars of the colored public schools in charge of Messrs. R. F. Wake and John Peters."

After the service the vestry took charge of the corpse as pall bearers and depositing the body in St. Phillips Church cemetery, Christy St. in a walled tomb prepared expressly for that purpose. A very large procession followed to the ground notwith-



standing the rain which heavy and incessant.

Thus was the good man borne to his rest amid the profound respect and sorrows of the stricken community. In spite, however, of church display and the imposing ceremony in the dead prelate's honor, the student of history can hardly find in the incident that exact assurance of a genuine meaning which the world generally associates with such occasions. Viewed from this distance there seems to have been much that was **theatrical** and for effect's sake in the whole matter. The Philadelphia Diocese under Bishop White had up to this time been generally regarded as holding the first place on the American Episcopal hierarchy by reason of his ranking position among American Bishops. Bishop White as already indicated, had been especially active in extending his faith among the colored people, having ordained two ministers long before New York had any thought in that direction. This together with the growing ambition of that already commercially supreme centre, would naturally have influenced the actions of a man of Bishop Onderdonk's bizzare temperament into much "sound and fury." Then too the Episcopal church under the Onderdonk leadership - there were two Onderdonks, brothers Henry and Benjamin, the one Bishop of Philadelphia and the other of New York at the same time, and both unfrocked and silenced because of intemperance at nearly the same time - had managed to draw the fire of antislavery quite frequently during those days. It had called down the wrath of the Garrisonians first in connection with the resignation of Rev. Williams from the antislavery Society (1833) and secondly in connection with the refusal to allow Alexander Crumwell to enter the Episcopal Seminary on the year (1839) before this funeral. Bishop Benjamin T. Onderdonk was held up for both acts in the galling criticism levelled at him at the time, and he no doubt took the occasion of Rev. Williams to remove some odium into which he had managed to get his denomination. The action of the New York diocese in never having admitted St. Phillips Church to membership in the diocesan convention but keeping it instead in the position of a missionary appendage to Trinity, and continuing it in spite of protest in that position for 13 years after the death of Rev. Williams shows more clearly than any words can that the great clerical cortege around his bier was intended more for its spectacular than for its solemn purpose. Notwithstanding all this the whole affair had the momentary effect of raising the life and achievements of our subject in the eyes of his neighbors at the time and has left a lingering fragrance around his memory which has floated down to the present day. Many tributes of respect were paid to the worth of the great preacher by his surviving contemporaries, two of which that by Bishop Onderdonk and the one by the Rev. William Douglass, an accomplished Philadelphia clergyman of the same race and faith, both of which are especially able productions, but have distinct merit of being the one decidedly theological while the other turns more to the historical narrative style, and as the Rev. Douglass knew him intimately his words in part may serve as a

fitting close here. He manifested a deep concern for the improvement not only of the people of his own charge, but for his brethren generally. Hence he was found contributing his influence and pecuniary means towards supporting the various organized instrumentalities that had a tendency to elevate and improve the condition and character of his oppressed people. I doubt very much whether there exists in the City of New York one single society having an immediate bearing on the general interests of our people but that met with his countenance and support. He was not conspicuous in these matters. For no man, perhaps, was less given to display or aimed less at popular applause than he. x x x x

x x x x x x x x x x x x

His hopes for an improvement in the character of our people were in the young and rising generation, in whom he manifested a lively interest. Did he see a promising youth, who lacked nothing but the necessary advantage to make him reflect credit on himself and people in a moral and intellectual point of view; he was the man that would spare no pains to get such a one in a situation favorable to the development of his powers. He took delight in seeking out such cases. There is now a high school in the City of New York that owes its establishment chiefly to his untiring efforts. He was a universal friend. His countenance which was expressive of kind and benevolent feelings, added to that ease and gentleness which were ever seen in his manners, told everyone that approached him that he was in the presence of a friend. "He loved everyone, hence he was universally beloved in return." (Douglass' sermons page 246 etc)  
Surely the poet had none other than such a man in mind when he wrote:

" Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power,  
By doctrines fashioned to the varving hour:  
For other aims his heart had learned prize,  
More bent to raise the wretches than to rise.  
His house was known to all the vagrant train,  
He chid their wanderings but relieved their pain.

x x x x x x x x x x

Pleased with his guests the good man learned to glow,  
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;  
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,  
His pity gone ere charity began.

Rev. Williams was survived by several members of his family, one of whom, a daughter, became quite noted first as the wife of Joseph Cassey, the rich Philadelphia philanthropist, and later as the wife of Charles Lenox Remond of Salem and Boston.